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Children's Guide to Parents and Other Matters A Book to Celebrate

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A beautiful book just published by Definition Press is *Children's Guide to Parents and Other Matters: Little Essays for Children and Others*.

In this book American poet Eli Siegel, who founded the philosophy of Aesthetic Realism, writes with depth, charm, and clarity about such large subjects as Caring for Somebody, Books, the World, Mothers, Work, Feeling Bad, Money, Being Angry—and more.



These essays, educator and poet Ellen Reiss writes in her introduction, “meet a child’s hope that what goes on inside him or her be really understood. They meet a child’s hope that the big, often confusing world around him or her can really have sense made of it—and be a friend.”

Nancy Hampton, Children’s Librarian at Countee Cullen Library said, “This is a book I am glad to have in the library for children.”

Each essay in this 8 x 10 book, with its bright yellow and orange cover, is enhanced by drawings by artist Dorothy Koppelman—of children and others in their various moods, and of many objects we see every day.

They are lively, surprising, and convey so much of the joy, turbulence, and thoughtfulness in a child’s life.

Children, parents, educators—everyone will have a new sense of discovery about the world, and greater pleasure, wonder, and feeling about people, everyday happenings and objects, what it means to care for somebody, and the real meaning of work and money.

Reading these essays I asked myself the question: How should we see people different from us, whether in our own family or



in a strange land far away? I’m sure every reader will be grateful for the essay on “People,” in which Mr. Siegel writes:

“People are of all kinds. No matter what kind they are, they have something to do with you. You use people right when, by finding out what they are, you come to be more yourself. Every person can tell you something about yourself.”

As a person who’s read this book to



youngsters, I want everyone to experience the good time of finding out how the feelings of others—a brother, friend, classmate, neighbor, and people of different races and nations—can have us know ourselves better! This way of seeing is so needed today, personally and internationally. Through a boy called James, a little girl named Delia, and others, the author makes very clear the mistake so many people make. He writes: “But sometimes a person can think he is good just because something else is bad.”

Children, as adults, will feel “Here’s someone honest about feelings in me I don’t like myself for!” And they’ll be able to see the big pleasure that comes from wanting to know and be fair to people, not make less of them.

From the manyness of “People,” we go to one person in “Mothers.” One of the great new ideas in this book is that caring for one person should be a means of caring for all people; and that a child hopes his or her mother is a means of honestly caring for the world. I think the drawing (on p. 42) of a thoughtful mother reading to an eager child, embodies this hope. It is a beautiful picture of two people made closer and



dearer to each other through knowing the world together.

Eli Siegel’s respect for the mind of a child is in the way he wrote—and talked—to children, which was deep and graceful and energetic, never patronizing. In *Children’s Guide* he discusses some of the biggest, most difficult subjects including beauty, anger, love, feeling bad—and without minimizing their largeness one bit, we feel, delightfully, our minds growing, taking in more, understanding more. For instance, in “About Beautiful Things” he writes: “Beauty is a hard subject; but just because it’s hard, it doesn’t mean you don’t have to think about it. James, in my opinion, if you don’t think about beauty at some time or other, you won’t know, the way you want to, the reason you were born.”

In “Being Angry,” as Mr. Siegel writes about what makes anger right or wrong, he



explains what hasn’t been seen before: the difference between a good anger and an ugly, selfish one. He enables readers to understand ways we are unfair so we can change them and be a better friend to everyone we know.

I think some of the most important, exciting questions a child would really like to think about are in “Big Questions for Little Ones.” For example:

- Is there any way that your mother is smarter than you?
- What do you think your mother was like at your age?
- Do you like yourself for how you see people?

Imagine an America in which children and grownups are trying to see each other with the honesty, freshness, depth and kindness these questions make for!

I’ll close, for now, with a comment on these sentences from “Happenings”: “Getting out of bed each morning you don’t see as a happening, because you don’t see it as something special....But if you had been sick for some weeks, and you had been lying in bed day after day, when you did get out of bed one morning and stayed out, that would have been a happening....You can find the surprising in many more places than people know usually.”

A woman I know read this essay to her 10-year-old daughter who was ill in bed. The little girl said she wasn’t bored or sad anymore when she thought of many things around her in this way. She liked the drawing of the happy child waking up to a new day with a friendly pussycat nearby, because that’s how she wanted to feel every day when she got out of bed.

As a mother, once a child, I most heartily recommend this book for every home and classroom.



Look for *Children’s Guide to Parents and Other Matters* by Eli Siegel in your library—you can ask for it at the children’s collection in Countee Cullen on 136th Street, or contact Definition Press (212) 777-4490; www.DefinitionPress.org—and read it with a young person you know. It will bring you closer to each other and to all other people and things in the wide world.